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Mike Eliseuson

Ed. notes:
The Internet can bring people together and revive old rivalries. The American Expeditionary Society was organized by Michael Eliseuson and it had some thirty members on a number of US campuses. The Nahanni trip was organized at Mankato State over several years. Sponsors were recruited, and endorsements were obtained. The actual trip consisted of George Boyum of Kasson, MN, Frank Graves of Clifton Heights, PA, Ivan T. Saunders from back East (interested in Big-Foot), Michael Eliseuson of Grand Rapids, MN, Wayne Engrebretson of Windom, MN, and Bruce Shorer of North Mankato, MN, the youngest member. The group powered up the Liard from Ft. Simpson in a skiff ladened with gear and pullinga canoe. The canoe was lost in the Beaver Dam Rapids, and other misadventures befell them. Here is some of their story gathered from Mike and George, with further input from the Ross River group.

In the course of several emails, Mike writes:

Greetings....happened to run across Dave Wolfe's account of his 1965 Nahanni journey. Don't know where to start with all of this, but I am Michael Eliseuson and keenly interested in anything about the 1965 journey and will share the experiences of the American Expeditionary Society's journey, if anyone cares to hear about it.

I will always remember the gigantic pancake-eating contest in Deadman's Valley. It about killed me off.....

We lived with Gus Kraus and his family for at least three weeks straight. The first time I got to Gus's cabin, late at night, he and Albert were visiting. I walked in on them and will never forget that initial scene. Two old-timers hard at their tea cups in that low-lit place. Sorta preternatural-looking and all. Albert was always just ahead of us on the river--we tried to leave him alone pretty much. He'd stop along the river, we'd arrive...and a time later he'd be gone again. Our boat was faster. At the Flat we gave it up and gave him a long head-start. Never saw him again.

Gus Kraus and I exchanged letters for many years after. I also sold him one of our OX engines, for which he paid for by beautiful wolf hide which he shipped to me. Ah, the way of the North Country (far north country), such wonderful trust, etc. Gus also saved my leg, perhaps my life, but that is a story to be told. I remember Albert well, and sleeping on his floor one night on the banks of the Liard at Fort Simpson. I can still smell the deep wonderful aroma of whatever it was he threw on me to keep me warm. I was too tired to care, to dark to see. I was cold, he sensed this I suppose, and suddenly warm bedding things fell on me and I fell instantly asleep.

SEVERAL HAVE ASKED ME ABOUT THE SOME 5,000 FEET OF COLOR, 16MM FILM WHICH WAS SHOT BY OUR SOCIETY OF THE NAHANNI IN 1965. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE SOME 800 OR SO B/W AND COLOR 35MM STILL PHOTOS WHICH WERE ALSO SHOT. LAST I KNEW, THE FILM WAS IN THE HANDS OF GEORGE BOYUM OF MANKATO, MN. THE STILLS WERE IN THE HANDS OF FRANK GRAVES OF PHILADELPHIA.

I have never seen any of it, just a little bit of the film. I was the film camera operator and Frank was the still camera guy. Also, Frank turned in a lot of moss specimens to the New York Botanical Gardens, one of our sponsors. Who can forget the thick moss up there? George was the older one and in his late 70's by now. Take five young men (except for George,being much older), who don't know each other, and then throw them in the wilderness for three or four months and see what happens. Never mind that two or three years of very detailed planning went into the thing. A lot of hidden agendas came out only after we were in the wilderness, which is a bad time for that to happen.

AFTER THE TRIP WAS CONCLUDED, I REMAINED ANOTHER THREE WEEKS IN THE NWT, DOING MY BEST TO HELP CAPTAIN SIMPSON OF THE YT HUSKY TOWBOAT. HIS COMPANY, NORTHERN TRANSPORT, LTD., WAS KIND ENOUGH TO TRANSPORT US ALL, PLUS OUR GEAR, FROM FORT SIMPSON TO HAY RIVER. WE WERE BERTHED AND FED AND TREATED EXTREMELY WELL. UNFORTUNATELY, WHEN WE DOCKED AT HAY RIVER, HALF OF HIS CREW DEPARTED IN ORDER TO RIDE OUR BUS SOUTH TO EDMONTON. SHIPPING SEASON WAS ENDING, ICE OVER WAS COMING, AND THERE WAS A BIG NEED FOR AT LEAST ONE MORE VOYAGE TO THE ARCTIC OCEAN. THE SHIP

WOULD HAVE TO LEAVE AFTER QUICK-LOADING. CONSEQUENTLY, I JOINED THE CREW AND WE WENT ON OUR WAY. HOWEVER, ONE RESULT WAS THAT I WAS NOT ON HAND TO PROTECT OUR AES PROPERTIES FROM IMPROPER HANDLING. WAYNE TRIED TO DO IT, BUT HE WAS UNDER ORDER TO REPORT IMMEDIATELY TO PENSACOLA FOR NAVY FLIGHT TRAINING AND CARRIER SCHOOL. I STILL THINK I MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE. I KNOW CAPTAIN SIMPSON WAS VERY GRATEFUL AND I FELT IT WAS THE LEAST I COULD DO. EVEN SO, WE UNDOCKED SHORT HANDED AND THEN LOST HALF THE BARGES IN A BIG STORM THAT NIGHT ON GREAT SLAVE LAKE. SOME GOOD STORIES FOR ANOTHER TIME. I WILL ALWAYS CHERISH THEM.

Mike

Ed Notes:
Hello Mike and fellows of Nahanni 1965,

I had a reply from George Boyum, and we had a pleasant phone conversation. He described himself as a vagabond preferring to wander the world. He has a place in Alaska for the summer, and visits MN family in winter.

The Nahanni trip was memorable, he said, and a lot of planning went into it. Being incorporated as the Am. Exp. Soc. permitted them to have rifles and to hunt in the area which they did. George recalled shooting a bull moose. Says Mickey Kraus, son of Gus & Mary, helped chase it towards him, and Mary helped dry the meat later. He had fond recollections of the Kraus having spent a week with them at the Hot Springs. He also mentioned visits with Stan and Dick Turner, and John Bruker, as well as Albert who was helping a geology crew.

His group powered up the Liard from Ft. Simpson in a skiffs with one canoe in tow. The canoe swamped while going up the Beaver Dam Rapids and they had to cut it free, loosing it. Also, the skiff nearly swamped in Fourth Canyon below the Falls, he stated. George remembers the pancake contest, too. Says he was 3rd with some 39 pancakes consumed.

George has lost touch with most of the group, but he does sometimes see, in North Mankato, Bruce Shorer, the youngest member of the team. He also mentioned Ivan T. Saunders who was the one searching for Big Foot - thinks Ivan lives back East.

As for the film, he says he doesn't have them. Thinks they were sent East to Ivan or Frank Graves. George thought the films were in poor condition, and the shoots were without clear reference points. Regarding the photos, they were left with Frank Graves, but he doesn't know what became of Frank {my attempt to find Frank in PA failed - located the wrong person}.

That's all for now.
Norm

HELLO NORMAN :

TO PUT YOU IN THE PICTURE BETTER, WAYNE AND I REPRESENTED THE SCIENCE FACTION IN THE FIELD; WHEREAS FRANK AND GEORGE REPRESENTED THE BIG GAME HUNTING FACTION. HOWEVER, FRANK DID UNDERTAKE SOME EXCELLENT MOSS COLLECTIONS FOR THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDENS AND DELIVERED THEM IN GOOD ORDER. THE HUNTING ISSUE DID NOT ARISE UNTIL WE WERE IN THE FIELD. IT SOON BECAME A QUARRELSOME ISSUE THROUGHOUT THE THREE OR SO MONTHS OF OUR NAHANNI WORK.

I WILL MAKE THE FOLLOWING POINTS IN RESPONSE TO WHAT GEORGE BOYUM TOLD YOU :

1) IT WAS THE AES SCIENTISTS AND EXPLORERS LICENSE WHICH PERMITTED THE TAKING OF FLORA, FAUNA, GEOLOGICAL SPECIMENS, ET AL. IT WAS NOT THE MERE FACT THAT THE AES WAS INCORPORATED. FURTHERMORE, THIS PERMIT DID NOT ALLOW THE TAKING OF SAME FOR EITHER SPORT OR FOOD.

2) THERE WAS NO BULL MOOSE SHOT BY ANYONE IN OUR PARTY. IT WAS A YEARLING COW MOOSE, SHOT BY GEORGE BOYUM, NEAR THE KRAUS CABIN, AND UNDER THE GUS KRAUS PERMIT, WHICH ALLOWED GUS KRAUS TO TAKE TWO MOOSE PER YEAR FOR FOOD. THIS IS THE MOOSE THAT MARY KRAUS JERKED INTO PEMMICAN AND I SPENT SEVERAL DAYS HELPING HER DO IT. SHE THEN GAVE US SOME, WHICH WE TOOK UPRIVER WITH US.

3) WE DID NOT SPEND ONE WEEK WITH GUS KRAUS AT HIS CABIN. IT WAS MORE LIKE TWO OR MORE WEEKS. OUR LARGE QUANTITY OF FILM HAD BEEN HELD UP AT CUSTOMS (SENT TO US FROM THE USA) AND WITH ONLY PLANE IN PER WEEK WE WERE HELD UP MUCH LONGER THAN WE WANTED TO BE.

4) WE HAD THE ONE SCOW AND A HALF-CANOE (WHICH WE DID LOSE IN THE BEAVER DAM RAPIDS--INDEED, WE NEARLY LOST THE SCOW AS WELL, AND US WITH IT.)

5) WE DID SWAMP THE SCOW JUST BELOW VIRGINIA FALLS. WE WERE IN HAYSTACKS (WHITE WATER) AND THE ENTIRE FOREDECK WENT UNDER. IT WAS A VERY CLOSE CALL. THE EVENT WAS FILMED. I WAS IN THE BOW AT THE TIME AND DOING CAMERA WORK.

6) I DOUBT VERY MUCH THAT THE 16mm FILM WAS SENT TO EITHER IVAN T. SANDERSON OR TO FRANK GRAVES. IVAN DIED IN 1972. HE WAS MY MENTOR AND SURROGATE FATHER. IF HE HAD RECEIVED THE FILM I WOULD HAVE KNOWN ABOUT IT. AS FOR FRANK GRAVES, HE AND GEORGE HAD A FALLING OUT SHORTLY AFTER THE NAHANNI TRIP.

7) I SAW PORTIONS OF THE DEVELOPED FILM AND THEY WERE CRISP AND CLEAR. I HAD WORKED AS A NEWS FILM REPORTER FOR KEYC-TV FOR A YEAR AND THEY TAUGHT ME CAMERA WORK IN EXCHANGE FOR MY FILMING OF NEWS EVENTS FOR THEM IN THE FIELD. I DID FIRES, FLOODS, BLIZZARDS, AND SO FORTH. ANYTHING OUTDOORS, WHICH WAS OUR AGREEMENT.

8) AS FOR FILM REFERENCE POINTS, I KEPT A SHOOTING LOG OF ALL CAMERA WORK AND THIS WAS VERY DETAILED FOR EACH SHOOT. ALSO, MUCH OF THE CAMERA WORK WAS SCIENTIFIC, I.E. INDIVIDUAL FRAME SHOTS. TO THE UNKNOWING, THIS WOULD LIKE ODD. THIS WAS ARRANGED FOR FOLLOWING CONSULTATION WITH PROFESSIONAL SCIENTISTS AT VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS.

9) GEORGE CAME VERY LATE TO THE PARTY. HE NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD WHAT WE WERE STRIVING TO DO, NOR DID HE SHOW MUCH INTEREST IN SAME. HE WAS DETERMINED ON HIS OWN AGENDA.

IN ANY CASE, GOOD LUCK AND LET US ALWAYS REMEMBER EVERYTHING WITH GREAT CHEER AND AFFECTION.

AS FOR THE GREAT PANCAKE CONTEST, I NOW BELIEVE 308 IS THE RIGHT FIGURE. THE YUKON BOYS BEAT US AND I HAVEN'T EATEN MANY PANCAKES SINCE. THE PANCAKES WERE NOT SMALL, EITHER. THEY WERE LARGE.

Mike

Regarding Pancakes, Dave Wolfe of the Ross River Group Replies:

Seems as if there is some disagreement on the number of pancakes we ate at Deadmen's Valley. May I quote from my diary?

Day 48, Aug. 7 Saturday. The day of the big feed. We were up about 8:00 and walked down to the RCMP cabin where the AES boys were camped. They had already begun to fry the pancakes, and had a few waiting for us. Also, their syrup was made and had a lot more sugar in it than we were used to. We began eating them 5 at a time. I had a particular duel w/ their self-proclaimed champion, Frank. He started to slow down at about 15, almost stopped at 20, then managed 23, w/ great difficulty. Chickenfeed! Nobody in our crew ate so few. In one hr, 10 min the 10 of us ate 308 pancakes. I was champ at 44. Bruce ran a close 2nd w/ 41, Bob inhaled 40, Marc sucked up 33 and Rollie managed a mere 31 just a shade above the average of the 10 of us.

Besides syrup, we had some of our blueberry jam and fruit soup. We had about 3 qts of their syrup w/ the hotcakes. After breakfast, we laid around trying to recuperate. It was trying to rain so Rollie + I went back to our camp to put things under cover. When we got back we started playing whist...After a few games we tried conversation + reading. Next, we did some baking. 1st came a bannock, followed by 3 cornbreads and one cake. Next we started cooking some beans. We added nearly a bag of jerky, a can of tomato paste, & assorted seasonings. In the meantime Marc started to make donuts, but had to use some of the AES biscuit mix.

The Beans were very good, but we couldn't come near eating the gallons we cooked. The donuts soaked up grease, so we baked the dough for cookies & put a choc. frosting on them. Delicious, but we were all too full of beans & soup by then to finish eating the cookies. We were so full we felt & acted like drunken fools. We laughed at everything & lost our co-ordination. It was finally midnite when we tried to stumble back over the wet rocks on shore back to our campsite. Our stomachs were so full we couldn't bend over. The expressions on people's faces were really funny. It looked sort of like pained contentment. Day 49 Aug 8 Sunday. We got up at a fair time in spite of our condition. Or maybe because of it. The tent really smelled foul...

I might add that we were quite limited in what we could carry. With five guys in two canoes, we were more than loaded, what with five hundred fifty pounds of food, to last for up to 55 days. We had 3500 Cal/man/day. Normally more than enough, but not when doing that much work. We were really pot-lickers. There were no leftovers, and when we weren't talking about food I was often thinking of, at night, dreaming about food. Worse, after we shot the moose, Marc, who was in charge of the food, started secretly hoarding food, so we would have enough for a week of lining up the Mackenzie from Ft. Simpson. His idea, not anybody else's, and we nixed that when we got to Ft. Simpson.

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Dave Wolfe

avid Wolfe writes:

In '65 Marc Wermager, Bruce Tannehill, Robert Henry, Rollie White, and I traveled up the Ross River, over the Divide, and down the South Nahanni and Liard to Fort Simpson. We met Albert on August 5 at the mouth of the Flat River, where he was guiding a crew of petroleum geologists, who stated that Faille was indispensable. As I recall, Albert said he was 77 at the time. We camped below them and walked up to join them that evening. We were joined by five members of the "American Expeditionary Society," a crew from Mankato (MN) State College. (They traveled in Keele River boats as far as the falls and were ostensibly researching the geology, flora and fauna of the Nahanni. In reality - or in fantasy - they were hunting Sasquatch.) Albert had to go across the river to get a geologist, and I went with him. He asked if we had spotted the hot springs above the canyons. We hadn't. He related how he once flipped his boat in a rapids, surfacing under the overturned boat. He hung on until his feet touched bottom, when he let go and made his way to shore. At this point we arrived on shore and met the geologist, so our conversation was interrupted. I was left with the impression that he lost his boat and gear, but made it out anyway. Perhaps he was near a base camp and did not lose everything. Perhaps he was spinning a yarn, but I doubt it.

At Fort Simpson, we chatted with a young man working for the Bay Company. He sometimes wandered past the far side of truth, but seemed in awe of Albert Faille. For what it's worth, he related how Albert had survived a winter with a broken back. With his bent and crooked back, Albert looked like he could have broken it several times. Faille, so the story went, did not return to civilization each year to re-outfit. When he did, however, it was because he "ran out of matches."

The "American Expeditionary Society" may have more recollections of Faille. I have never tried to contact them, but asked them to record their names and addresses in my diary. The three signatures that are legible are: George A Boyum, Kasson MN; Michael, c/o American Expeditionary Society, Inc. Room 117, Eckes Building, North Mankato, MN 56003; Frank B. Graves Jr., 409 Cherry St., Clifton Heights, PA 19018. I'm including this just in case you care to try to locate them through the internet.

For what it's worth, Gus Kraus said that we were the first ever to cross the divide, from the Ross to the Nahanni, what with the old times traveling cross country. Soon after entering what is now referred to as the Rock Garden we saw paint and aluminum on a number of rocks.

We met our first people at Virginia Falls, a hunter from Georgia and his guides, Don Turner and John, an Austrian, whose last name I did not record. I mention this because they likely met Albert and the geologists that summer.

Well, thanks. This has been enjoyable, pulling out my diary and reliving that summer.

Regards, Dave Wolfe

d Notes:

ve been fortunate to see the photographs of Dave's trip. Marc Wermager, who now outfits canoeists on the Bloodvein River in outheastern Manitoba, gives a splendid slide show of this 60 day adventure, five friends' summer of discovery.

hat they heard of Albert was correct. He had a broken back, an injury sustained when logs fell on him from a lumber truck cident. This old injury caused him considerable difficulties but he rarely complained. One summer, while lining this boat river, the rope snapped, and he fell forward aggravating his back. Unable to move, he camped where he lay for a month. That inter, Albert strapped a wooden board to his back to brace it while it re-healed.

bert was in the habit of wintering over on the Nahanni for years at a time, surprising Ft. Simpson residents with his unexpected ppearances. When he left in 1950 and didn't reappear in '51, the RCMP went looking for his body in 1952. When they met on Flat R., Albert only had some beans left.

Albert's boating mishap occurred in September of 1959 in First Canyon. A gust of wind caused his skiff to veer into a rock and overturn. He lost all his gear, maps, ore samples, and five hundred dollars (money he was going to use at Ft. Nelson to have his teeth fixed). He reached the south shore with only a penknife and some dry matches. After drying off by a driftwood fire, he left a note written on the canyon wall in charcoal, and started up a creek out of the canyon. Eight days later, he was picked up below the Hot springs by a helicopter. His overturned boat and note had been seen by a patrol boat which radioed the report to Yahanni Butte where Dick Turner was waiting for Albert's arrival. Dick persuaded the pilot of a petroleum survey helicopter to take him in on a search and rescue.

As for the American Expeditionary Society from Mankato (MN) State College, an information request to Minnesota State University, Mankato, Archives and Special Collections Librarian, revealed that the group was formed in May of 1965 by founder and first president Mike Elisenson who had a personal interest in science.

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Eliseuson

Thanks for including me in your discussions.

Regards,
Dave Wolfe

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